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THE FORMER RANGE OF THE BUFFALO.

BY JOHN G. HENDERSON.

COMPARATIVELY speaking it will be but a short time until the buffalo, like the great Irish elk, the mastodon, the dodo, and other extinct animals, that have lived since the appearance of man upon the earth, will only be known to us by its bones, with this advantage, however, over the mastodon; its character, habits and territory over which it formerly ranged are all accurately described by the historian and naturalist, as well as the causes which are leading to its extinction. As civilized man advances, the buffalo, the elk, the deer, the beaver, the otter, the bear, the panther, the wild-cat and wolf, and other members of the wilderness or prairie fauna, must give way to domesticated animals—animals whose original wildness and savageness have been subdued, and whose whole organization, mental and physical, has been by thousands of years of contact with civilized man modified and changed so as to become subservient to his wishes and purposes. Some, as the buffalo, elk and deer, are slaughtered for their flesh and hides; others as the otter and the beaver, for their skins alone; while still others, such as the panther, wild cat and wolf, are killed on account of their savageness, their existence being incompatible with the presence of civilized man.

For the buffalo are substituted our common cattle, for the wolf and wild cat, our domesticated dog and cat. Instead of clothing himself with the skins of the buffalo and deer, and living upon the fruits of the chase, the civilized man carries with him the sheep, from whose fleece he makes his coat for winter; or rears the cotton plant, while from its fibres he manufactures his fabrics, instead of fraying the inner bark of the cedar or basswood for the same purpose, as did the aboriginal man.

But civilized man in his march into the wilderness, or in his advance upon the prairies, meets with many new forms of animal life and from their number he now and then selects some, such as the wild turkey, for example, which seems to have a pre-adaptation to domestication, and from such he adds to the stock of his domesticated species.

But the advent of civilized man not only disturbs the native fauna by the extermination of large numbers of animals, but also by causing others to increase largely in numbers. When the enemy of any animal is exterminated or thinned out by any cause, such animal will rapidly increase in numbers. For illustration, the enemies of the smaller birds—the larger birds of prey—are destroyed by civilized man. This gives the small birds an advantage in the struggle for existence and they increase in numbers. It will thus be seen that the real amount of disturbance of the native fauna of the prairie or wilderness is not so easily comprehended as one would at first imagine.

The early Jesuit missionaries and French *voyageurs*, who by the way of the Great Lakes penetrated to the valley of the Mississippi, at the end of the seventeenth century, found the buffalo in thousands grazing upon the prairies of Illinois and neighboring states, or flying in countless numbers before the Red-hunter, or the prairie fire.

The idea of their domestication at once entered their heads, and, from that time to the present, many attempts have been made to domesticate them, or, by crossing with domesticated cattle, to impart to the latter some additional valuable quality; but I believe that hitherto all such attempts have proven abortive. Now and then, upon the western frontier, you may see the dun color, high shoulders, and somewhat restless disposition, that indicate a cross between the domestic cow and buffalo bull, but, like the red-blood of the Indian, the mighty throng that is pressing on, soon absorbs it, and obliterates effectually its marks, if not wholly its effects.

It was with a peculiar interest that I read the descriptions of these strange animals, transmitted home by the Jesuit or *voyageur*, who two hundred years ago first looked upon “our vast prairies on which herds of *wild-cattle* pastured in confusion.” Strange contrast! Where now iron rails mark the highway of civilization and commerce, then were only paths made by the buffalo, or the Indian trail to hunting grounds or from village to village. Where now are great cities, built of brick, stone and iron, with their iron and marble fronted palaces of trade, then were Indian villages of sometimes five hundred cabins made of rushes sewed together by the hands of industrious squaws so ingeniously as to render them impervious to rain and snow, and so light

as to render it easy for the Indian woman to obey her dusky master when he ordered her to "take up her house and walk." Now huge boats, with gilded saloons propelled by powerful steam engines float on the bosoms of our rivers, then the light canoe made of the cotton wood log by the use of the fire and stone ax, or the still lighter birch-bark, were the only keels that had ever disturbed their waters.

As the sources of information of this character are not accessible to many readers of the NATURALIST, I may be pardoned for freely transcribing from accounts given in Jesuit letters and *Relations*, and from the pages of early French writers and *voyageurs*. Here we see old Illinois—as it was at the end of the seventeenth century—the otter, beaver, and wigwams upon the banks of its rivers, the panthers, wolves, bears and wild-cats in its forests, with its great prairies of wild grass where grazed the deer, the elk, and the buffalo, or at noon-tide shielded themselves from the summer's sun under the shade of lonely cotton wood trees, or in the beautiful groves that here and there studded the plain, like islands upon the bosom of the ocean. Here, too, we see primitive man hollowing out his boat by the aid of fire and the stone ax, skinning animals and dressing their hides with the flint knife, and engaged in war or the chase, armed with the war-club and bow, and whose arrows were tipped with bone or flint. Here are presented to our view the first effects of the contact of civilization and barbarism, we see the Indian eagerly exchanging skins of the buffalo and beaver, and other articles demanded by civilization, for the iron ax, knife, gun, and kettle, to supply the place of the stone ax, flint knife, bow and arrow, and Indian *akeek*. Here we see the gay and volatile French associating upon terms of equality with the Indian, each adopting the manners and habits of the other and thus assimilating the habits of civilized man with the superstitions and customs of the savage, for the "Frenchman forgot not that the uncivilized man as well as the civilized man, was his brother and he deported himself as man to man." Here we see the Jesuit, the medicine-man of civilization, struggling to displace the superstitious rites and ceremonies of the medicine-man of the forest, to substitute his own no less whimsical, foolish and absurd rites and ceremonies in their stead; and the triumph of the former, when, as on one occasion, after forty dogs had been sacrificed to appease the spirit of destruction,

which, in the form of disease, was laying waste the village, the medicine-man was forced to bow his knee to the cross and offer up his prayer for mercy to the great Manitou of the French. Here in these old Jesuit *Relations* and Letters we see the Red-man on bended knee before the blessed virgin, reciting the rosary or repeating *Ave Marias* translated into the Algonquin language by the Jesuit fathers.

The Jesuit missionary, Father Marquette, who, with Joliet and five French *voyageurs*, discovered and explored the Upper Mississippi, in the year 1673, was the first white man who penetrated to the habitat of the buffalo, by way of the Great Lakes. Father Claude Allouëz and other missionaries, who had penetrated the wilderness as far as *Che-goi-me-gon*, a great Chippewa Village at the extreme west end of Lake Superior, no doubt had heard from the wandering Sioux, or as they were known in those days, the Nadouessi, of the great plains that lay farther westward and of the vast herds of buffaloes that roamed over them. History, indeed, records the fact, that these Sioux Indians told the strange pale-faces that came among them with "pictures of hell and of the last judgment" of their manner of shielding themselves from the winter's storm with the hides of wild-cattle for the roof of their cabins instead of bark. It was here, too, that the missionaries heard of the Great River, and here, for the first time in history, appear those two Algonquin words, *Messi-Sepe*. Father Alloüez, in speaking of the Sioux Indians says, "They live on the great river called Messipi." He blended the adjective *Messi*, great, and the noun *Sepe*, river, into the word *Messipi*, which was no greater corruption of the original than our Missis-sippi. It was here, too, that Father Marquette received tidings of the Great River, and the nations that dwelt upon its banks, and it was here that he resolved to explore it. "This great river," he says, "can hardly empty in Virginia, and we believe that its mouth is in California. If the Indians who promise to make me a canoe do not fail to keep their word, we shall go into this river as soon as we can with a Frenchman and this young man given me, who knows some of these languages, and has a readiness for learning others; we shall visit the nations which inhabit it, in order to open the way to so many of our fathers who have long awaited this happiness."*

At the same Chippewa Village, the Jesuits met the *Illinois* Indi-

* Marquette's Letter to Le Mercier.

ans, who came there to rehearse their sorrows and ask the protection of the French. The Sioux upon the one side and the Iroquois upon the other, had made savage inroads upon them. They told of the noble river upon which they dwelt. "They had no forests, but instead of them, vast prairies where herds of deer and buffalo, and other animals, grazed on the tall grasses." This is the first mention that is made of the buffalo upon the prairies of Illinois. None of the French had yet seen the buffalo unless, perchance, some trader had followed the Indians to their hunting grounds, though many thousands of robes had already been transported from the region of the Upper Mississippi to Europe. They were taken from the buffaloes by Indian hunters, tanned and prepared by the hands of the squaws, and then in birch-bark canoes, transported by way of the western rivers to the *portages*, where canoe and cargo were carried across to the head waters of rivers that emptied into the Great Lakes, over whose waters, still in the birch-bark canoe, they were carried to Quebec, and there by their Indian owners, exchanged for articles of French manufacture suitable to the wants of savage man.

Father Marquette says of the Illinois, "They always come by land. They sow maize which they have in great plenty; they have pumpkins as large as those of France, and plenty of roots and fruit. The chase is very abundant in wild-cattle, bears, stags, turkeys, duck, bustard, wild-pigeon and cranes. They leave their towns at certain times every year to go to their hunting grounds together, so as to be better able to resist if attacked. They believe that I will spread peace every where, if I go, and then only the young will go to hunt."*

It was not, however, until the fall of the year 1672 that he received orders from his superiors "which bid him embark at last upon the voyage so long and fondly projected."

Louis Joliet, whose name is now imperishably connected with that of Marquette in the discovery of the Mississippi River, arrived in the spring of 1673, with orders, from Comte de Frontenac, governor of Canada, and M. Talon the intendant, for the exploration of the great river.

The winter before the arrival of Joliet was spent in busy preparation for the great voyage. From the wandering Indians Father Marquette gathered all the information he could, and from their

* Ibid.

statements he drew the first rude map of the Great River, and marked upon it the names of the nations that dwelt upon its borders. He says "as we were going to seek unknown countries, we took all possible precautions, that if our enterprise was hazardous it should not be fool-hardy; for this reason we gathered all possible information from Indians, who had frequented those parts, and even from their accounts traced a map of all the new country, marking down the rivers on which we were to sail, the names of the nations and places through which we were to pass, the course of the great river, and what direction we should take when we got to it." *

It was on the 17th of May, 1673, that they started from the mission of St. Ignatius at Michilimakinak, and "made their paddles play merrily over Lake Huron and that of the Illinois (Lake Michigan) into the bay of the Fetid (Green Bay)." Here they met the Wild-Oat Indians, or, as they are called in French, the *Folles-Avoines*, a nation that dwelt upon the borders of the bay and the Menomonee River. Marquette informed them of his intended voyage, at which they were much surprised. They tried to dissuade him from the undertaking by telling him of hostile nations that dwelt upon the borders of the *Messi-Sepe*, whose scalping knives were never sheathed and who never spared strangers, but tomahawked them without any provocation; they told him of war-parties constantly in the field; that the Great River was very dangerous, unless the difficult parts were known; that it was full of frightful monsters who swallowed up men and canoes together; that there was a demon there who could be heard from afar, who stopped the passage and engulfed all who dared to approach; and finally, they told him of heat that was so excessive in those countries, that it would infallibly cause their death.

The zealous missionary thanked them for their good advice, and told them that he would only be too happy to lay down his life for the salvation of souls. They entered Fox River, of which Marquette says: "it is very beautiful at its mouth, and flows gently; it is full of bustards, duck, teal, and other birds attracted by the wild-oats,† of which they are very fond." On the 7th of June they arrived at a village of the Mascoutins, where they found three nations—the Miamis, the Maskoutens and Kikabous, living in

*Journal of Father Marquette.

†The *Zizania aquatica* Linn.

cabins made of rushes. Father Marquette was enraptured in beholding the position of their town, "the view was beautiful and very picturesque, for from the eminence on which it was perched, the eye discovered on every side prairies spreading away beyond its reach, interspersed with thickets or groves of lofty trees." After having assembled the Indians and addressing them upon the objects of their voyage, and after having received a present from the Indians, a mat which served them as a bed, they set out upon their voyage. They embarked in the "sight of a great crowd, who could not wonder enough to see seven Frenchmen alone in two canoes dare to undertake so strange and hazardous an expedition."

With the assistance of two Miami Indians, given them as guides, they found their way through the marshes to the "*portage*" where canoes and cargoes were carried and safely deposited in the Wisconsin. Here they bid good-by to the waters that flowed through the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence by Quebec, and turned to follow those that were to lead them into strange lands. They bid their Indian guides good-by, and the *voyageurs* "were alone in an unknown country in the hands of Providence." They floated silently down the Wisconsin. "It was an unbroken solitude, where the ripple of their paddles sounded loudly on the ear, and their voices, subdued by the stillness, were sent back in lonely echoes from the shore." *

They "saw no small game or fish, but deer and elk in considerable numbers." Bancroft renders the word *vaches*, buffalo, but this is a mistake. They had not yet reached the buffalo ground. The words *vache sauvage*, as used by the Canadian French, applied to the American elk, *Cervus Canadensis*.†

At length, on the 17th day of June, with a joy that Marquette could find no words to express, they glided into the Great River, the storied theme of many an Indian tale. They gently followed its course to the forty-second degree of latitude. Here all was changed. Their birch-bark canoes were now floating between the great prairies of Iowa and Illinois, while the river was studded with beautiful islands fringed with willows whose branches were reflected back from the bosom of the water. Everything was strange and calculated to strike the imagination of the *voyageurs*. At one time a great fish struck one of the canoes so violently that

* McConnell; *Western Characters*, p. 88.

† *Discovery and Ex. of the Miss.*, J. G. Shea, p. 16.

they thought it would break the canoe in pieces; at another, they saw a monstrous animal swimming across the river.* And thus they floated on until they arrived at the home of the buffalo.

“Having descended as far south as $41^{\circ} 28'$,” Marquette says, “we find that turkeys have taken the place of game, and *Pisiki-ous*, † or wild cattle, that of other beasts. We call them wild cattle because they are like our domestic cattle; they are not longer but almost as big again, and more corpulent; our men having killed one, three of us had considerable trouble in moving it. The head is very large, the forehead flat and a foot and a half between the horns, which are exactly like those of our cattle, except that they are black and much larger. Under the neck there is a kind of large crop hanging down, and on the back a pretty high hump. The whole head, the neck and part of the shoulders are covered with a great mane like a horse’s; it is a crest a foot long, which renders them hideous, and falling over their eyes, prevents their seeing before them. The rest of the body is covered with a coarse, curly hair like the wool of our sheep, but much stronger and thicker. It falls in summer and the skin is then as soft as velvet. At this time the Indians employ the skins to make beautiful robes, which they paint of various colors; the flesh and fat of the *Pisikious* are excellent and constitute the best dish in banquets. They are very fierce and not a year passes without their killing some Indian. When attacked, they take a man with their horns, if they can, lift him up, and then dashing him on the ground, trample on him and kill him. When you fire at them from a distance with gun or bow, you must throw yourself upon the ground as soon as you fire, and hide in the grass; for if they perceive the one who fired they rush on him and attack him. ‡ As their feet are large and rather short, they do not generally go very fast, except when they are irritated. They are scattered over the prairies like herds of cattle. I have seen a band of four hundred of them.” §

Thus far the exploring party had not seen a single human being; on the 25th of June, however, they saw a human track in the

*The “great fish,” it is supposed, was the Mississippi cat-fish, and the “monstrous animal” either the tiger-cat or the panther.

† Algonquin name for buffalo, called also, in Indian, *Beezhike*.

‡ “When these animals are shot at a distance of fifty or sixty yards, they rarely, if ever, charge on the hunters.” *Audubon and Bachman, Quadrupeds of North America*. Vol. 2, p. 44.

§ Marquette’s Journal, p. 19 of J. G. Shea’s *Dis. and Ex. of The Miss.*

sand. Marquette and Joliet followed it. It led to a path, and that to an Indian village. Marquette hailed the Indians in the Illinois language, and they answered, "we are Illinois." They feasted the pale-faces upon sagamity,* fish, dog, and buffalo—the fat of the land. The master of ceremonies blew his breath upon the food to cool it, and, with spoons of buffalo horn, put three or four mouthfuls in the mouths of their guests, "as we would feed a bird." After five days of feasting, smoking and council, six hundred men, women and children escorted them to their boats, and, after promising to return to stay with them, they again committed themselves to the current of the *Messi-Sepe*. They passed by the *Piesa* paintings upon the face of a limestone cliff, of which Marquette gives a description, and while conversing about them, they heard the rushing of the waters of the Missouri, known to them by its Algonquin name of *Pekitanoui*, or Muddy River. Swollen by the melting of snows a thousand miles away in the mountains, it was pouring its impetuous current into that of the Mississippi, freighted with large trees, branches and drift wood, "real floating islands," says Marquette. He speaks of the mouth of the Ohio River, then known as the *Ouaboukigou*, which we have corrupted into *Wabash*, and applied to a tributary of the Ohio. The word Ohio is of Iroquois origin. The original was *Oheo* or *Youghio*, and meant *beautiful*. Farther down they met other Indians who feasted them on *wild-beef*. Marquette says of them "that they did not know what a beaver was, and their riches consisted in the skins of *wild-cattle*." He speaks of the Indians on the lower Mississippi as being armed with bucklers made of the skins of wild cattle, and says "that the number of wild cattle they heard bellying made them believe that the prairies were near." The *voyageurs* returned about the last of August or the first of September, passing up the Illinois River. Upon its banks he again met the Peoria Indians, the same that were at Moingona. Of the country Father Marquette remarks, "we had seen nothing like this river for the fertility of the land, its prairies, woods, *wild-cattle*, stag, deer, wild-cats, bustards, swans, ducks, parrots, and even beaver; its many little lakes and rivers."†

Father Claude Allouez, in a "Narrative of a Journey to the Illinois," written shortly after Marquette's voyage, in speaking of the

* Indian meal boiled in water and seasoned with grease.

† Marquette's Journal, p. 19 of J. G. Shea's *Dis. and Ex. of the Miss.*

occupations of the Indians, says, "they hunt cattle, deer, turkeys, cats, a kind of tiger, and other animals, of which they reckon twenty-two kinds, and forty kinds of game and birds."*

The buffalo was of incalculable benefit to the Indians. Of the hoofs and horns they manufactured glue. The tallow was an article of commerce and was used for various purposes, among which was that of mixing with Indian meal to make *sagamity*. The tongue was considered a delicacy and the "jerked" beef served them for bread and meat. Of the skins the Indians made robes for beds or the floor of the cabin, or for blankets at night. Of the raw hide they cut thin strips for making snow shoes and various other purposes. The skins were used by the Sioux Indians for covering for their lodges and the modern Mandans stretch a raw buffalo hide over a wicker frame, and thus, using it as a substitute for birch bark, make a light, portable boat similar in construction to that of the coracle of the ancient Britons, or the Esquimaux *kaiak*.† They also made spoons and ladles of the horns, and, according to Marquette, the Illinois Indians used the bones for the same purpose. He says, "they made all their dishes of wood, and their spoons of the bones of the buffalo, which they cut so well that it serves them to eat their *sagamity* easily." The chiefs wore beautiful scarfs "ingeniously made of the hair of bears and wild oxen."

From Father Marest we learn that these scarfs were made by the women, also the mats for wigwams. In a letter dated Kaskaskia, November 9th, 1712, he says, "the chase and war are the sole occupations of the men, while the rest of the labor falls upon the women and girls. They are the persons who prepare the ground for sowing, do the cooking, pound the corn, build the wigwams, and carry them on their shoulders in their journeys. Their wigwams are constructed of mats made of platted reeds which they have the skill to sew together in such a way that the rain cannot penetrate them when they are new. Besides these things, they occupy themselves in manufacturing articles from buffalo's hair, and in making bands, belts and sacks, for the buffaloes here are very different from our cattle in Europe. Besides having a large hump on the back of the shoulders they are also entirely covered with a fine wool, which our Indians manufacture instead

*Ibid, p. 75.

†See Dr. Wilson's Prehistoric man. p. 115.

of that which they would procure from sheep, if they had them in the country." *

Father Rasles also describes the occupations of the women. "They toil like slaves from morning till night. It is their duty during summer to cultivate the earth and plant the Indian corn; and from the commencement of winter they are occupied in manufacturing mats, dressing skins, and many other works of the kind, for their first care is to provide everything that is necessary for their cabin." †

In the chase of the buffalo the Indian relied mainly upon his bow and arrow. The Indians of that period were very expert in their use. The little bow and the tiny arrow, pointed with the little flint arrow-heads found everywhere over our state, was placed in the hands of Indian boys who ranged among the hills, practising upon small birds, and "they became so skilful that at ten or twelve years of age they scarcely ever failed to kill the bird at which they aimed." ‡

Little boys of the Sioux nation, were thus early taught the use of the bow, and, also, "shot small sun-fish with a bow and an arrow, with a little spear fastened to it." § The Illinois were in the habit of shooting fish with the bow and arrow. "They embarked in a canoe with their bows and arrows; standing upright, for the purpose of more easily seeing the fish, as soon as they perceived it, they pierced it with an arrow." || I have no doubt but that the Indian boys of Illinois also shot the sun-fish with the bow and arrow.

Father Marquette described the Illinois Indians as "well-formed, nimble, and very adroit in using the bow and arrow." Allouez bears testimony upon the same point, "they ordinarily carry only the war-club, bow, and quiver full of arrows, which they discharge so adroitly and quickly that men armed with guns have hardly time to raise them to their shoulders. They also carry a large buckler made of the skins of wild-cattle; which is arrow proof and covers the whole body." ¶

From Father Rasles, we learn the character of the arrows, and

* Kip. *Early Jesuit Missions*. p. 199.

† Ibid. 38.

‡ Ibid. 26.

§ *History, Condition, Prospects* etc. Schoolcraft, Vol. 4. p.61.

|| *Early Jesuit Missions*, Kip. p. 40.

¶ *Dis. and Ex. of Miss.* J. G. Shea, p. 75.

the skill with which they were used. "Arrows are the principal arms which they (Illinois Indians) use in war and in the chase. They are pointed at the end with a stone cut and sharpened in the shape of a serpent's tongue; and if no knife is at hand, they use them also to skin the animals they have killed. They are so skilful in using the bow, they scarcely ever fail in their aim, and they do it with so much quickness that they can discharge a hundred arrows in the time another person would use in loading a gun,"*

The Indians on the lower Mississippi shot an arrow clear through the horse of De Soto, and it is said that the modern Indians on the plains, think it no unusual feat to send an arrow through a buffalo, so that it falls on the ground upon the other side, and this was doubtless done often by the Indians of the olden time upon our prairies.

Some of the descriptions given by the Jesuits of our vast prairies, with herds of buffalo and other animals grazing upon them, are charming indeed. Father Rasles in his letter above quoted, speaks of vast herds of buffaloes and roebucks, and says, "that not a single year passes but they kill more than a thousand roebucks and more than two thousand buffaloes. From four to five thousand of the latter can often be seen at one view grazing on the prairies."†

"Of all the nations of Canada, there are none who live in so great abundance of everything as the Illinois. Their rivers are covered with swans, bustards, ducks and teals. One can scarcely travel a league without finding a prodigious multitude of turkeys, who keep together in flocks, often to the number of two hundred."‡

Father Hennepin also speaks of herds of buffalo, grazing between

* *Early Jesuit Missions* Kip. p. 39.

† Lewis and Clark in descending the Missouri in 1806, on passing the environs upon White River, estimated that they saw twenty thousand on the prairies at one time." Schoolcraft, *Hist. Cond. Prospects, etc.*, Vol. 4, p. 93.

"Some idea of the immense numbers of bisons to be seen on the wild prairies, may be formed from the following account, given to us by Mr. Kipp, one of the principals of the American Fur Company, who, while he was travelling from Travers' Bay to the Mandan nation in the month of August in a cart heavily laden, passed through herds of buffalo for six days in succession. At another time he saw the great prairie near Fort Clark on the Missouri River, almost blackened by these animals, which covered the plain to the hills that bounded the view in all directions, and probably extended farther." *Quadrupeds of North America*, Audubon and Bachman, Vol. 2. p. 47.

These quotations are made to justify the statements as to the vast numbers of buffaloes that formerly roamed over the prairies of Illinois.

‡ Kip. *Early Jesuit Missions*, p. 39.

the bluffs and the banks of the Mississippi, or as he called it, in his journal, the river Colbert. The voyage of Hennepin down the Illinois and up the Mississippi River, was in the year 1680.* Of the scenery upon the Illinois River, called by him, the *Seignelay*, he says "it is lined with hills, whose sides are covered with fine large trees. Some of these hills are half a league apart, leaving between them a marshy strip often inundated, especially in the spring and fall, but producing, nevertheless, quite large trees. On ascending these hills, you discover prairies further than the eye can reach, studded at intervals with groves of tall trees, apparently planted there intentionally."

Father Membre, in his narrative of the voyage of La Salle (1682) gives a glowing and poetical account of the beauty of the country. He speaks of the Illinois River as "edged with hills, covered with beautiful trees of all kinds, whence you discern vast prairies on which herds of wild-cattle pasture in confusion." . . .

"The fields are full of all kinds of game, wild-cattle, stags, does, deer, bears, turkeys, partridges, parrots, quails, woodcock, wild-pigeons and ring-doves. There are also beavers, otters, martens, till a hundred leagues below the Maroa,† especially in the river of the Missouri, the *Ouabache* (Ohio) that of the Chepousseau (the Cumberland?) which is opposite it, and on all the smaller ones in this part."

"The cattle of this country surpass ours in size; their head is monstrous, and their look frightful, on account of the long, black hair with which it is surmounted, and which hangs below the chin, and along the houghs of the animal. It has on the back a kind of crest, of which that nearest the neck is longest, the others diminish gradually to the middle of the back. The hair is fine and scarce inferior to wool. The Indians wear their skins, which they dress very neatly with earth, which serves them for paint. These animals are easily approached: they could be easily domesticated."‡

Charlevoix, who passed through the Mississippi Valley in 1721, gives a fine and detailed description of the buffalo, as seen by him on the prairies, and the Indian method of hunting it. As his work is very scarce I transcribe the whole of his remarks upon the buffalo.

* *Dis. and Ex. of the Miss.* J. G. Shea, p. 108, 109.

† The Tamaroas, a tribe of Indians located just east of the mouth of the Illinois River.

‡ *Dis. and Ex. of the Miss.* J. G. Shea, p. 179, 180.

“In the southern and western parts of New France,* on both sides of the Mississippi, the most famous hunt is that of the buffalo, which is performed in this manner: the hunters range themselves in four lines, which form a great square; and begin by setting fire to the grass and herbs, which are dry and very high; then as the fire gets forwards they advance, closing their lines. The buffaloes which are extremely afraid of fire, keep flying from it, and at last find themselves so crowded together, that they are generally every one killed. They say that a party seldom returns from hunting without killing fifteen hundred or two thousand. But lest the different companies should hinder each other, they all agree before they set out about the place where they intend to hunt. There are also some penalties appointed against those who transgress, this rule, as well as against those who, quitting their posts, give way to the beasts to escape. These penalties consist in giving a right to every person to strip those who are guilty, and to take away even their arms, which is the greatest affront that can be given to a savage; and to pull down their cabins. The chiefs are subject to this penalty as well as the others, and if any were to endeavor to exempt them from this law, it would raise a civil war amongst them, which would not end soon.”

“The bull, or buffalo, of *Canada* is bigger than ours; his horns are low, black and short, he has a great beard of hair under his muzzle, and a great tuft of hair upon his head, which falls down over his eyes and gives him a hideous look. He has a great bump on his back, which begins at his hips, and goes on increasing up to his shoulders; and this bump is covered with hair, something reddish, and very long; the rest of his body is covered with black wool, which is much valued. They say that the skin of the buffalo has eight pounds of wool on it. This animal has a large chest, the hind parts small, the tail very short, and one can scarce see any neck it has, but its head is bigger than that of the European bull. He runs away generally at the sight of any person, and one dog is enough to make a whole herd take to full gallop. The buffalo has a good smell, and to approach him without being perceived near enough to shoot him, you must go against the wind. When he is wounded he is furious and turns upon the hunters. He is as

*The whole of Canada together with the country on both sides of the Mississippi, from its source to the gulf, was then claimed by the French, under the name of New France.

furious when the cows have newly calved. His flesh is good, but they seldom eat any but that of the cows, because the buffaloes are too tough. As for his skin, there are none better; it is easily dressed, and though very strong, it becomes supple, like the best Chamois. The savages make shields of it, which are very light, and which a musket ball will not easily pierce.”*

On the 6th day of October, 1721, as Charlevoix and his party were descending the Illinois River, he says he saw a great number of buffaloes crossing it in a great hurry, and he scarce doubted but that they were hunted by the Indians. On the next day he passed the mouth of the “*Saguimont*,† a great river that comes from the south; five or six leagues lower down he left on the same hand another, smaller, called the river *Macopines*.‡ These are great roots, which eaten raw are poison, but being roasted by a small fire for five or six days or more, have no longer any hurtful quality.”§

In the year 1711, Father Marest made a journey on foot, with three Indian guides, from Cahokia on the east side of the Mississippi, south of the present city of St. Louis, to Peoria, on Lake *Pimetoui*, — this word, in Algonquin Indian, means land of fat beasts. He left the site of the present city of Springfield to his right about six miles, I should judge. He says, “journeys which are made in this country should not be compared with those in Europe. There you find from time to time villages and towns, and houses in which you can rest, bridges or boats to cross the rivers, beaten paths which lead to your destination, and persons who can place you in the right way, if you have strayed. Here there is nothing of the kind, and we travelled for twelve days without meeting a single soul. At one time we found ourselves upon prairies which were boundless to our view, cut up by brooks and rivers, but without discovering any path which could guide us, and then again it became necessary to open a passage through dense forests, in the midst of brushwood covered with thorns and briars, and at other times we had to cross marshes filled with mire, in which we sometimes sank to the waist.” . . . “Besides these inconveniences, common to all those who travel through these de-

* Charlevoix, *Travels in North America*, Vol. 1, p. 92.

† Sangamon.

‡ Macoupin.

§ Charlevoix, Vol. 2, p. 162.

served lands, we had the addition also of hunger during the whole of our journey. It was not because we did not see great numbers of stags and deer and particularly of buffaloes, but our Indians were not able to kill any. A rumor they had heard the day before our departure, that the country was infested by parties of the enemy (probably the Sioux), prevented them from carrying their guns, for fear of being discovered by the report when they fired, or of being embarrassed, if it should be necessary for them to seek safety in flight. Thus, they could use nothing but their arrows, and the buffaloes which they hit, fled, carrying with them the arrows by which they had been pierced, and went to die in some distant place." "It was not without reason that they feared meeting with any war party of the enemy, for they would have received no quarter from them. Either their heads would have been cut off, or at best they would have been made prisoners, to be burnt at last before a slow fire, or to be used for food in their feasts." *

From the same letter, written at Kaskaskia in 1712, we learn that it was then the constant habit of the missionaries to accompany the Indians in their hunts. There were during the year two great hunts; that of the summer, which scarcely lasted three weeks, and that which took place during the winter, which lasted four or five months. With but a slight exertion of the imagination one can see the motley group of Indians, French and half-breeds, headed by the Blackgown,† issuing from the old Kaskaskia of 1712, where the wigwams of the savage and the rude huts of the French indicated the contact of civilization and barbarism, and turning their faces to the north toward the great prairies where they were to engage in the chase of the deer, the elk and the buffalo.

These old missionaries soon learned to love the rivers and prairies of Illinois and, if duty called them to Canada or the Great Lakes, to rejoice upon their return to the Illinois missions. Father Marest remained a short time with the *Peorias* and then continued his journey on to Michilimakinak. After stopping there a few days he started to return in the bark canoe by the way of the Lakes and the St. Joseph River, called now Miami River. He

* *Early Jesuit Missions*, Kip, p. 216, *et seq.*

† Everywhere among the western Indians the Jesuits were known by the name of Blackgowns.

says he "ascended the River St. Joseph to the '*portage*.'" Here they transported all there was in the canoe to the source of the Illinois River called *Haukiki*, which was a corruption of the Indian word *Theakiki*. They then carried over the canoe, launched it and continued their route. They were two days in making this portage, and then followed the windings of the *Theakiki* to the prairies of Illinois, where the old missionary joyfully exclaims, "at last we perceived our own agreeable country, the wild buffaloes and herds of stags, wandering on the borders of the river; and those who were in the canoe took some of them from time to time, which served for our food."*

The buffalo was first seen by Cortez and his followers, in 1521, a single individual being observed in a kind of menagerie or zoological collection of Montezuma, in Mexico. To this place the animal had been brought from the north by Indians, to whom the collection of rare birds and quadrupeds had been committed by the native monarch. It was not, however, till the expedition of Coronado north of the Gila, in 1540, that its natural ranges were penetrated. It was not found at all in the highlands of New Mexico. The Spanish adventurers had passed the Rio del Norte, and entered the region of the great southern fork of the Arkansas, before they encountered the immense herds which they describe. So headlong was the course of the droves of these animals following each other, that they sometimes pitched into and filled up entire gulfs and defiles lying in their track.† The buffalo was found by De Soto (1541) after he had crossed the Mississippi and entered the present area of Arkansas and Missouri.

Audubon and Bachman mention the buffalo as once existing upon the Atlantic coast, and further add that "authors state that at the time of the first settlement of Canada it was not known in that country, and Sagard Theodat mentions having heard that bulls existed in the far west, but he saw none himself." Lawson, in his "Journal of one thousand miles' Travel among the Indians, with a Description of North Carolina" (London, 1700) speaks of two buffaloes that were killed in that State on Cape Fear River. Audubon says that the bison formerly existed in South Carolina

* *Early Jesuit Missions*, Kip., p. 224.

† *Discovery and Ex. of the Mississippi*, J. G. Shea, p. 18; *History, Cond., Prospects etc.*, Vol. 4, p. 93. Schoolcraft cites Castenada's *Narrative of an Expedition to Cibola*, etc., p. 34, Mss.

on the sea board, and that he was informed that, from the last herd seen in that State, two were killed in the vicinity of Columbia. "It thus appears that at one period this animal ranged over nearly the whole of North America."* Names of places still retained, in many instances, indicate the former range of the buffalo. A river upon the Upper Mississippi was called by the Indians *Beez-hike Sepe*, or Buffalo River, "on account," Father Hennepin says, "of the number of buffaloes found there." Charlevoix speaks of a river near Niagara Falls, which bore the name of *La Riviere aux Bœufs*, or Buffalo River, which was, no doubt, a French translation of the Indian name. Schoolcraft says that the city of Buffalo perpetuates the tradition of the former existence of the buffalo near Lake Erie. From Charlevoix we learn that, at the time he passed through Lake Erie (1721), the buffalo was still found in its vicinity. Writing from *The Strait* (Detroit), he says, "at the end of five or six leagues, inclining towards the Lake Erie, one sees vast meadows which extend above a hundred leagues every way, and which feed a prodigious number of those cattle which I have already mentioned several times."†

The view that the name *La Riviere aux Bœufs*, and that of the city of Buffalo, perpetuate the traditionary existence of the buffalo at the east end of Lake Erie, is corroborated by the fact, shown by Dr. Elliott Coues in the November number of the *NATURALIST*, that the buffalo formerly existed on the Kenawha River in Virginia.

Schoolcraft says, "It was found in early days to have crossed the Mississippi above the latitude of the mouth of the Ohio; and at certain times throughout the present area of Kentucky. It not only ranged over the prairies of Illinois and Wisconsin, but spread to Southern Michigan, and the western skirts of Ohio. Tradition says that it was sometimes seen on the borders of Lake Erie. It was also common to the southern parts of Wisconsin, and crossed the Mississippi into Minnesota above St. Anthony's Falls for the last time, it is believed, in 1820;"‡ and Audubon states, "in the days of our boyhood and youth, buffaloes roamed over the small prairies of Illinois, and herds of them stalked through the open woods of Kentucky and Tennessee; but they

* *The Quadrupeds of North America*. Vol. 2, p. 55.

† Charlevoix, *Travels in North America*, Vol. 2, p. 13.

‡ *History, Cond., Prospects, etc.*, Vol. 4, p. 92.

had dwindled down to a few stragglers, which resorted chiefly to the 'Barrens,' towards the years 1808 and 1809, and soon after entirely disappeared."*

From my own reading and reflection upon the subject, I would place the range of the buffalo, before the advent of the whites in this country, within the following area,—beginning upon the Atlantic sea-board at Charleston, thence north of west to the Mississippi, thence down the river to the gulf, thence to the mouth of the Rio Grande, thence up said river to the Rocky Mountains, thence north to the Great Slave Lake in latitude 60°, thence south-east to the source of the Mississippi, thence to the south end of Lake Michigan, thence east to the east end of Lake Erie, thence south-east to the Atlantic coast, near the mouth of Chesapeake Bay, and thence down the coast to place of beginning. I can at least show good authority for the buffalo having been found at all of the extreme limits of the above area, but of course we can only conjecture as to whether it ranged over the whole of the above territory at the first settlement of this country.

But the buffalo has been driven westward until now the area over which it ranges is probably not over one-tenth of that above described. Like the Red Indian it must succumb in that mighty struggle which has been going on from the remotest geological time,— which has literally filled the earth with relics of lost species and still continues to-day, controlled by the same laws, and producing the same effects as it did when the last mastodon laid down to die.

The old French and Indian population, before the year 1812, exterminated the buffalo from the prairies of Illinois, notwithstanding the countless numbers that roamed over them at the end of the seventeenth century and during the first half of the eighteenth. It has not been more than one hundred and twenty or or one hundred and fifty years at farthest, since they were being slaughtered by the thousand everywhere over our state, yet, though for years I have kept a sharp lookout, I have never met with a single bone of this animal.† Audubon states that in the

* *Quadrupeds of North America*, Audubon and Bachman, Vol. 2, p. 36.

† Prof. Worthen informs me that he has found the bones of the buffalo very rare in this state. A portion of a skeleton comprising big bones, ribs, etc. was found with the Niantic mastodon, four feet below the surface; and Mr. Broadhead found a skull only a foot or two below the surface in Christian or Montgomery county, and those are all the remains he knows of having been found recently in the state.

Far West "the prairies are in some places whitened with the skulls of the buffalo, dried and bleached by the summer's sun and the frosts and snows of those severe latitudes in winter."* No doubt their skulls and other bones were as plenty upon the prairies of Illinois a hundred years ago. It seems to be the object of nature as soon as possible after life is extinct to destroy the remains of every organized creature, and to throw back its component parts into the rounds of circulation again, and it is only a very rare accident that even the hardest parts, such as hoofs, horns, teeth, etc., are fossilized. I presume that not one in every fifty thousand, of the buffaloes that were in Illinois during the eighteenth century, will stand a chance to attest its former existence by a single bone at the beginning of the twentieth century. Large numbers of the Elk, *Cervus Canadensis*, grazed upon the prairies of Illinois, as will be seen by the above extracts, and Audubon says, that a few were still to be found in Kentucky, and across the Ohio River in Illinois, at the time he settled in that state. Their horns, which from their size and hardness, were better calculated to resist the effects of time than the buffalo, are sometimes, but rarely, found in our state. Two of them were picked up this year, in Scott County, within ten miles of the Illinois River.

"Instead of its being part of the plan of nature to store up enduring records of a large number of the individual plants and animals which have lived on the surface, it seems to be her chief care to provide the means of disencumbering the habitable areas lying above and below the water, of those myriads of the solid skeletons of animals, and those massive trunks of trees, which would otherwise soon choke up every river and fill every valley. To prevent this inconvenience she employs the heat of the sun and moisture of the atmosphere, the dissolving power of carbonic and other acids, the grinding teeth and gastric juices of quadrupeds, birds, reptiles, and fish and the agency of many of the invertebrata."† No better illustration of these words of Sir Charles Lyell can be found, than that of the scarcity of the bones of the buffalo and other large mammals that once formed a part of the fauna of the great prairies of the Upper Mississippi.

* *Ibid*, Vol. ii, p. 43.

† *Antiquity of man*, p. 146.

NOTE:—Teeth of the Bison have been found in the Quaternary clays of Gardiner, Me. See NATURALIST, Vol. i, p. 268, note.—EDS.